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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 KABUL 000491

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SUBJECT: DOSTUM IMPEDES UZBEK EFFORTS AT JUNBESH PARTY

REFORM

REF: A. ANKARA 217
[1](#)B. KABUL 303
[1](#)C. KABUL 399

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Afghanistan's Uzbek community is ready for change, but their traditional protector, General Abdul Rashid Dostum, is standing in the way. The larger political background to the ongoing crisis following the February 2-3 abduction of Akbar Bay (ref B) is that Dostum is losing support. The reform-minded leadership of the Junbesh Party is pressing to hold a Third Party Congress to establish a more professional organization, move beyond the party's militia roots, and adopt an exclusively political strategy based on engagement with the government. Dostum pays lip service to reform, but lacking an alternative avenue to power, respect, and personal safety, he has refused to loosen his vice grip on the party that he founded but which is no longer satisfied with his feudal leadership. President Karzai's strategy of appointing independent Uzbeks to senior positions has contained Dostum, but it has failed to create a political alternative to Junbesh. The party's fault lines provide Karzai opportunities to further isolate Dostum by engaging -- and protecting -- genuine reform-minded Uzbeks within Junbesh and dissatisfied splinter groups. The Uzbeks represent ten percent of the national vote, they are ready for change, and they would welcome Karzai's support.

Party Congress Seeks Transition To Professionalism

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Junbesh-e Milli Islami-e Afghanistan (National Islamic Movement of Afghanistan), the largely secular party that grew out of the anti-Taliban militia led by Uzbek strongman General Abdul Rashid Dostum, is stuck in transition. Reformers within the party are encouraging Dostum to relinquish de facto party leadership and to permit reform. They have been planning for a year to hold a Third Party Congress to resolve fundamental issues about the party's character and membership that have dogged it since

the fall of the Taliban. (The party was launched as a military organization in 1992. Its First and Second Party Congresses in 2002-3 reformed the organization as a political party based on a charter that endorsed demilitarization, the formation of the Afghan National Army, and the pursuit of political reform. Dostum relinquished formal party leadership two years ago, soon after Karzai appointed him to the largely symbolic role of Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief of the Armed

Forces.) The Third Party Congress seeks to resolve once and for all the question of whether the party will remain a political fig leaf covering what remains an essentially military organization or to fully transition into a modern, representative, issue-based political party steered by its membership, with national aspirations and appeal. The old guard Uzbek Communists loyal to Dostum must also decide whether to open the party membership and leadership to a more pan-ethnic and multi-regional membership, including Uzbeks not currently among Dostum's inner circle, or risk alienating their support base in the Uzbek and pan-Turkic communities they claim to represent.

13. (SBU) Dostum is blocking reform. Uzbeks deeply respect his leadership in war, but view his military orientation as a liability in a time of relative peace. He received over 10 percent of the national vote in the 2004 presidential election, but his limited education deprives him of opportunities in the government now available to his war-time peers. Notorious for his shifting allegiances and brutish methods, he views himself as, above all, the indispensable protector of Afghan Uzbeks, a position which protects by crushing promising leaders. As his public support declines, he becomes more reliant on the military wing of the party. The controversy over the party congress boils down to a

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battle over his leadership and the future of the party.

The Junbesh Party Stuck in Dostum's Bruising Grasp

14. (SBU) The party congress will consist of elected delegates assembled to debate and adopt a new party constitution. Mohammad Ismael Munshy, the party's second deputy chairman and head of its congress commission, reports that party members in 24 provinces have selected over 500 delegates to the congress. Party members not among Dostum's inner circle report that Dostum and conservative members realize that the reformers now make up the majority of the party, so Dostum is trying to pack the congress with his supporters. Munshy reports that another 200 delegates were later added to the 500 elected delegates, and the 113 congress commission members were chosen by just 3,500 select party members rather than the full membership.

15. (SBU) Reformers want to hold the party congress in the jirga tents in Kabul emphasizing the party's pan-ethnic, national aspirations, but Dostum insists that it take place in his power base of Sheberghan, Jowzjan province. Dostum supporters have proposed a draft constitution that preserves a potent symbolic role for Dostum, obliges the party chairman to consult with him on fundamental issues, and requires the party to provide for his "physical and political immunity." These provisions would effectively maintain Dostum's dominance over the party and prevent the reforms Uzbeks crave.

16. (C) Dostum has brutally suppressed reform, causing three delays in the party congress over the past year. The first delay followed the beating and rape of Junbesh first deputy chairman Faizullah Zaki in June 2006. The scandal galvanized the party leadership into pursuing a reform agenda for the Third Party Congress while taking pains not to push Dostum into outright opposition. (Dostum later apologized, paid Zaki's medical bills, and gave him \$40,000 and a new car.) The second delay followed the May 2007 ouster of then-governor of Jowzjan province Juma Khan Hamdard, a

Pashtun who fled his post following violent clashes between his body guards and pro-Dostum protesters, resulting in 10 fatalities. Many observers regarded the ouster of Hamdard as a carefully timed signal to other Uzbeks of Dostum's power. (The Junbesh Party occupied the provincial offices in Jowzjan until the arrival of Hamdard's successor, Hashim Zari. at which point Dostum had his henchmen remove the furniture from the office, claiming it belonged to him.) The third delay followed another beating in November 2007 of the party's first deputy chairman and senior ethnic Turkman, Mohammad Ismael Munshy, resulting in several broken bones and severe head wounds. (Munshy had tried to convince Dostum to hold the congress in Kabul rather than Sheberghan.)

¶7. (C) The February 3 abduction and beating of Akbar Bay is the latest of Dostum's drunken fits sparked by a challenge to his feudal authority (ref B). On February 18 the government suspended Dostum's formal position as Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief of the Afghan National Army pending his cooperation with an inquiry by the Attorney General into the incident (septel). Dostum has said he will neither cooperate with the inquiry nor allow himself to be arrested, and he is reportedly seeking safe passage to the North (ref C).

Fault Lines: Old Guard, Nationalists, Independents

¶8. (SBU) The inability of Junbesh to hold its party congress for over a year has exposed divisions within the Uzbek community. According to an internal Junbesh history, the party was founded by and remains under the control of the old guard Communists of the Parcham faction with whom Dostum began his military career serving the Afghan communist puppet state before turning against the Soviets. This core faction is dominated by Dostum, who formally resigned as head of the party two years ago. Its caretaker leader is Sayed Norullah, the chairman of the Junbesh party's 137-member Central Committee until formal elections are held at the party

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congress. All the party leaders speak about the need for reform, but Norullah's faction has tried to stack the delegates in favor of maintaining an official role for Dostum. Norullah told the Embassy on December 2 that "reform will be a long, hard process" because some members are "used to the military approach."

¶9. (SBU) Dostum is close to losing the support of several old guard party loyalists who nevertheless believe Dostum needs to step aside. These self-styled 'intelligencia' working for reform within the party include first deputy chairman Munshy and second deputy chairman Zaki (each the recipient of a beating at the hands of Dostum). Munshy told ISAF that "Junbesh is a brand and many people have died fighting for it." Munshy and Zaki reportedly told ISAF that at stake is whether the process of political reform will continue, or the party will vote to rearm itself in reaction to growing anxiety about the southern insurgency, the staying power of international forces, and a central government seemingly intent on marginalizing Junbesh. Munshy and Zaki believe that they can transform the party from within.

¶10. (SBU) Dostum has largely lost the support of a group of Uzbek nationalists, Junbesh members whose loyalties rest more with other Uzbeks than with Dostum personally. Their titular leader, Sigbatullah Zaki, was killed in the Baghlan bombing on November 7. (Other senior members include Sardar Mohammad Rahman Oghly from Faryab and Haji Rauf Ibrahimy from Kunduz, whose brother Abdul Latif Ibrahimy is the governor of Takhar province.) They claim over a dozen supporters in parliament -- over half of Junbesh's political representatives. They are disappointed that Dostum's personal friction with the Karzai government has prevented the Uzbek community from receiving what it regards as a fair share of political spoils commensurate with their numbers, and have told the Embassy on numerous occasions that they will form their own party if

Junbesh does not change.

¶11. (SBU) President Karzai has shunned both Junbesh factions in favor of ethnic Uzbek independents. None of the three Uzbek ministers, one Turkmen minister, or three Uzbek provincial governors (in Samangan, Takhar, and Sar-e Pul) are Dostum loyalists. The only senior Turkman in the government, Minister of Social Affairs Noor Mohammad Qarqeen, has distanced himself from Junbesh and agitated for carving an ethnic Turkman province out of Jowzjan, a proposal which has so far had little resonance but could resurface if the Turkmen vote becomes relevant in the 2009/10 elections. The provincial governors in Dostum's power base of Jowzjan (Hashim Zari) and Faryab (Abdul Haq Shafaq) are not Uzbeks or Junbesh members, but are acceptable to Dostum. Karzai's containment strategy has isolated Dostum, but has not created an alternative center of Uzbek political power outside Junbesh capable of challenging Dostum. None of the Uzbek/Turkmen independents are thought to command electoral support.

Sources of Power Apart from Politics

¶12. (SBU) Junbesh remains both a political party and a loose coalition of military commanders. It is the political wing of Dostum's empire, but it also maintains the loyalty of a waning cadre of Afghan National Army officers and former Junbesh sub-commanders who maintain illegally armed militias, many of whom are members of parliament. Dostum dominates Jowzjan province, and his network of loyal local warlords is thick in Faryab and Sar-e Pul, reportedly including in Sar-e Pul the Khan brothers, MP Payenda and his warlord brother Kamal, and in Faryab MP Fatullah Khan and several district level warlords (Commander Qadir in Pashton Kot, Commander Rais Rahmat in Khuja Sabz Posh, Commander Ghafoor Palauan in Belcheragh district, and Qodus Uzbek in Adkhoy). Many Uzbeks continue to believe that these militias are necessary to defend them from the creeping "Talibanization" of the small Pashtun communities in the northwest and from Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HiG) as it builds on its support among Pashtuns in the

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northeast. (Uzbeks are alarmed by evidence of Taliban infiltration into Faryab from Badghis, and keenly aware that the provincial governors of the four northeastern provinces are all former HiG members.) Junbesh chairman Norullah told the Embassy that Junbesh has "networks in the north to take care of the Taliban."

¶13. (SBU) Dostum claims that he plays a critical role controlling ambitious district level warlords, drug lords, and organized crime bosses for whom lucrative opportunities for organized crime and drug smuggling create irresistible incentives for cooperation with insurgents. In fact, they also help Dostum defend his influence from other aspiring warlords. Dostum's rivalry with General Abdul Malik's Hezb-e Azadi-e Afghanistan (Afghanistan Freedom Party, which is especially influential in Shirin Tagab and Dawlatabad districts of Faryab province) has been the source of some of the most violent inter-factional fighting since the ouster of the Taliban. Dostum also has an intense rivalry with Mohammad Noor Atta, the shrewd, pro-government ethnic Tajik governor of Balkh province and Jamiat-e Islami representative in the north, whose considerable influence is likewise bolstered by a network of loyal district-level strongmen. Atta released a statement supporting the government following the Akbar Bay incident.

¶14. (SBU) Dostum also continues to cultivate ties with foreign governments, especially Uzbekistan and Russia. (The first prize in traditional musical instrument festival sponsored by Dostum was an all-expenses paid trip to Moscow.) Dostum is rumored to be one of the links between the United

Front and financial support from Moscow. One source reported that Dostum committed to support the United Front only after Russia agreed to pressure Uzbekistan to restore Dostum's Uzbek visa, which was reportedly revoked following the beating of Faizullah Zaki. Junbesh maintains offices in Uzbekistan, Iran, and Turkey.

Dostum, the 800 Pound Guerilla

¶15. (SBU) Dostum remains the quintessential warlord, an enduring symbol of Afghanistan's war-ravaged past whose bravado and violence earned for him the status of a respected, but deeply flawed national hero. Even his closest supporters who laud his leadership in times of war lament his destructive tactics in the relative peace prevailing in the north. Dostum's claims that he is a vital force for stability (checking the ambitions of Taliban and lesser warlords alike) are no longer credible. His influence is waning as his former soldiers integrate into the Afghan National Army, his political allies trade their warring past for constructive engagement, and economic opportunity supplants fealty to warlords as the vehicle for advancement for northern minorities. As he loses support, his muscle is replaced by insecurity. Upper House Deputy Speaker Hamid Gailani, who once respected Dostum, likened him to an angry, caged wild bear. Afghans, including many Uzbeks once loyal to Dostum, no longer support his methods and would prefer that he gracefully retire.

¶16. (C) Dostum's blundering provides opportunities for reform-minded Junbesh leadership as well as for Karzai to increasingly isolate him from both the government and the opposition. Karzai's strategy of appointing unrepresentative Uzbeks has not created an Uzbek political alternative, but it may encouraged Junbesh's internal divisions. Karzai could isolate Dostum by engaging -- and protecting -- genuine reform-minded Uzbeks within Junbesh and splinter groups dissatisfied with Dostum's ego-driven politics. Karzai could start by replacing the weak senior Uzbek officials in the cabinet with genuine leaders of the community in the run up to the 2009/10 elections. The Uzbeks, representing ten percent of the national vote, are ready for change and would welcome Karzai's support.

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